



August 17, 2016

Dear Cultural Heritage Commissioners,

I wanted to thank City staff and commission members of the CHC for quickly arranging a site visit and the hearing on September 15.

In anticipation of the site visit I wanted to offer some “color” to the events that took place at the MWD headquarters since my late partner Leonard Hill and myself acquired the “Annex” portion of the building in 2011.

The process of acquiring the “Annex” was fraught with obstacles and what was anticipated in 2010 to be a short escrow of 21 days of a fully entitled and permitted Adaptive re-use project ended up taking more than a year due to litigation that was initiated by the Holly Hill Community Church in 2007 against our predecessor. Despite the fact that our predecessor won in all court cases, the Church seemed to be reluctant to accept the court decisions and prolonged the process in any way possible.

When we finally closed escrow in 2011, we were well aware of the important history of the MWD buildings and the original campus as well as the significance of Architect William Pereira in shaping the built environment of Southern California as a key leader in Mid-Century Architecture.

The Annex (Tower) was in a terrible shape as the previous owner attempted to start construction a number of times and ended up doing the soft demolition of all interiors, removal of all the roof top mechanical equipment and removing all the cast concrete guard rails in the upper floors.

Here are few photos of the condition of the building in October of 2011 when we closed escrow.



**1855 Industrial Street Suite 106, Los Angeles CA 90021 P 213 622 2150 F 213 622 2151**





***Photos above depict the condition of the building 5 years ago upon acquisition. The removal of the roofing and mechanical systems of the roof level made the building vulnerable to water penetration that caused extensive damage over 5 years that the building was left in this condition.***

**1855 Industrial Street Suite 106, Los Angeles CA 90021 P 213 622 2150 F 213 622 2151**

As we do in all our projects, we recognize that the story behind the building and its strong original

Design elements are important features to celebrate. So in 2012 as we were planning the project, we took an extensive look at the history of MWD and the Architectural practice of William Pereira.

In this specific case, our job was made easy as MWD has extensive archives of all their significant projects as well as all the decision making of the Board which are well documented since inception.

I personally spent hours and days with the Historian of MWD, David Keller who carries full responsibility for the MWD archives. With his help we were able to reconstruct the process that lead to the acquisition of the unique site at 1111 West Sunset Blvd.

The site previously was the home of Sisters Hospital (The Site was purchased at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century by Daughters of Charity from Prudent Beaudry) housed in a beautiful Victorian building that was torn down to make place for the new “futuristic” campus. (Daughters of Charity used the proceeds to purchase Land at the corner of 3<sup>rd</sup> Street and Alvarado and built the Hospital St Vincent Medical Center)

However, even the Pereira design left a few items intact from the original site: the beautiful Palm trees that were planted by the Daughters of Charity are still on site today watching the traffic on Sunset Blvd as they did watch different type of traffic on Route 66 100 years ago.



Sunset Boulevard: the palm trees and stairs that led to the Hospital. In the background the retaining wall of MWD basement is being erected. All can be seen in a site visit.

(photos curtesy of Metropolitan Water District)





On the South side of the Annex, a Korean Church was keeping up the original MWD Campus that was constructed in 1962. The Sanctuary was added to the West court yard of the building facing Sunset as can be seen today and the two wings on the north were leased to two educational institutions, Shepard's University and an Elementary school. The building was in full capacity and operation up to 2013 when the various factions of the Holy Hill Community Church could not agree who is the legitimate owner of the building. Below are few images of the building in 2011. Note that the Pereira designed Sun screens are all there with the exception of 8 sections that were removed due to the Northridge earthquake.



***East Elevation – All original Pereira sunscreens and guard rails in first level in place***



***East Elevation – Shepard University Campus***



*East Elevation, Main Entrance to Holly Hill Community Church*



*Main Entrance into Former MWD – View from lower parking*





***Aerial view of the MWD Campus with the addition of the Sanctuary***

*(photo provided by Metropolitan water district)*

As you will see in your site visit, *all the elements of the Campus are in fact in place.*

The 1962-63 plan (Phase 1) of the complex has not changed other than the addition of the sanctuary (structurally an independent building that did not interfere with the original 1962 building sections around it) and the intentional removal of the Sunscreens and Guard rails by the new ownership. The MWD parking structure remains intact.

It appears that removal of these elements was done specifically to claim the building has lost a feature. However, the building technology of 1962-63 is not so different from today so producing precast panels and attaching them back to the building is a simple process. As the original building plans are available, one can replicate the screen detail.

I have to confess that I was rather disturbed by the testimony of the project manager at the June 21<sup>st</sup> hearing in which he acknowledged that the panels were in such a bad shape and disintegrated that they had to dispose of all of them. (when I confronted Palisades with the inaccuracy of the testimony, they confided that “few” panels were kept at the contractors yard, so hopefully we can see them back on the building soon and eliminate this section from Mrs Snow presentation)

This stands in stark contrast to the fact that the structural issue, as cited by their engineer, was the connection detail and not the panel itself. This can be fixed by enhancing the connection detail (that no

doubt may have corroded over the past 54 years). I have photographs showing the removed panels neatly stacked up on site.

I also contacted David Orenstein, one of the principals of Palisades group questioning the removal and according to David; they were to save on site all the panels that can be removed intact and he assured me that similar panels made out of lighter material can be installed in lieu of the panels removed.







1855 Industrial Street Suite 106, Los Angeles CA 90021 P 213 622 2150 F 213 622 2151



1855 Industrial Street Suite 106, Los Angeles CA 90021 P 213 622 2150 F 213 622 2151





1855 Industrial Street Suite 106, Los Angeles CA 90021 P 213 622 2150 F 213 622 2151





1855 Industrial Street Suite 106, Los Angeles CA 90021 P 213 622 2150 F 213 622 2151

Below are photos of the construction process in 1961-63 reflecting the Non Structural role of the precast panels and the ease by which they can be installed (or removed) without affecting the integrity of the structure.



***West Elevation 1962 – This is basically how the building looks now once the owner removed the Sun screens and guard rails.***



I also wanted to respond to a question that was asked, “Why did it take so long to file the application”

It is absolutely correct that most of the Historic analysis was done 3 years ago. At this time we engaged Kaplan Chen Kaplan (who was our consultant for the designation of the Nabisco Factory) as our historic consultant to help evaluate the merits of a potential Historic designation.

I had compiled research material that we found in the MWD Archives as well as photos from Getty Images. The initial analysis reflected that the Annex on its own was 40 years old could not be submitted independently. In addition, the Annex tower was built as part of the whole headquarters complex. The Church Building just turned 50 years old so the overall building can be nominated based on its Historic merits.

The difficulty was that the Church had no inclination to support the nomination and was embroiled in litigation among its factions and neighbors. We realized that religious institutions have certain rights that prevent nomination unless they consent to it. So regrettably we had to freeze the effort until the Church “politics” would change

We had invited OHP staff to the site and walked the Campus. Staff recommended that we apply for designation of the entire Campus as it was a unique improvement that reflected the Early 60<sup>th</sup> and the role of the large government agency.

The Change of ownership of the Church asset and the eminent threat of complete destruction of the MWD building brought the historic designation effort to become very relevant.



I urge you to tour the building, enjoy the courtyard (A visionary design of Pereira in 1961), walk around the balconies that provided shading and good light management to the offices inside, enjoy the majestic beauty of the palm trees, check the original and refurbished storefront system of the annex,

Look at the unique design of tile work with the oval theme running through, the new Bridge to the annex and the theme's white concrete pillars that support it, the restored precast panels with aggregate that we were able to salvage and install at the bridge, the original Travertine entrance to the Annex and of course the majestic white precast columns that define both the low rise and the tower.

Thank you for your time and efforts to keep an important chapter of LA History alive.

Yuval Bar-Zemer